Bob Woodward, The Washington Post And His Many Books

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WASHINGTON — After two years of burrowing, Bob Woodward says he is about to start writing what may well be his sixth best-selling book. This time his subject is the Pentagon.

Mr. Woodward, whose 19-year career with The Washington Post includes a Pulitzer Prize for his Watergate coverage, now carries the title of assistant managing editor for investigations at the paper.

But Post readers should not expect to taste the fruit of Mr. Woodward's investigation for quite a while, thanks to his highly unusual arrangement with the paper, an arrangement that is probably unique in journalism.

Mr. Woodward is in effect being paid a full salary by The Post while he conducts an investigation that will result in a book, for which he is also being paid well by his publishing house, Simon & Schuster. The Post also pays half the salary of a reseacher Mr. Woodward pays the other half. In return, the paper gets first serial rights to the book for a dollar.

The Qualms of Others

The arrangement disturbs editors at some major papers.

"I definitely think there is a problem of two masters," said John S. Driscoll, the editor of The Boston Globe, who said that he would not allow any such deal.

While Mr. Woodward, 47 years old, acknowledges that there are potential conflicts, he says he sees the arrangement as a workable compromise.

"In-depth reporting — I've shied away from the term investigative reporting — is a burn-out profession," Mr. Woodward said recently, "and so through the good graces of The Post and my publishers, I've set it up so I can do these projects and books in tandem, and avoid some of that tendency to burn out."

Benjamin C. Bradlee, the executive editor of The Post, said he hoped the arrangement with Mr. Woodward would continue "forever," but added he would like more Woodward stories in the paper during the book-writing.

Writing While He's Writing

Mr. Woodward appeared in The Post 14 times in 1989; on half of those articles, he shared a byline. In 1987, the year "Veil," his book on the Central Intelligence Agency, was published, Mr. Woodward had 51 bylines. He attributes that to the Iran-contra affair being constantly in the news. He says he does not expect such a surge this time.

"I don't want to be greedy, but I don't want him to squirrel away too much," said Mr. Bradlee, who added that what appeared in the paper was almost entirely up to Mr. Woodward.

Indeed, some of Mr. Woodward's Pentagon sources agreed to speak with him on the condition that nothing they say will appear in The Post until a book is published. That is the agreement he made with Adm. William J. Crowe Jr., a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the current chairman, Gen. Colin L. Powell, for the Pentagon book, say members of their staffs.

Mr. Bradlee declined to comment on Mr. Woodward's decision to save a deathbed interview with William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, for "Veil." Mr. Woodward said Mr. Casey admitted in that interview that he knew about the sale of arms to Iran and the use of the profits to support the contras in Nicaragua. The admission, a nod of the head as Mr. Casey murmured the words "I believed," would have been unpersuasive outside the context of a book, Mr. Woodward said.

Even the appearance of an ethical problem could be avoided if Mr. Woodward severed his daily tie to The Post, where he technically heads an investigative team. While he takes his turn as weekend editor every few weeks, he seldom goes to the paper, preferring to roam Washington and work from his Georgetown home.

Clinging to the Paper

Mr. Bradlee and other friends discount money or a need for The Post's influence as the reason he remains the paper's employee.

Mr. Woodward said he clings to the paper because it gives him "a sense of being related to the real world," and because of "the energy" he derives from his occasional trips to the newsroom.

But those who know him say that Mr. Woodward's ties to The Post are deeply emotional and that Mr. Woodward's traumatic childhood made it natural that he would cling to the paper as a safe harbor.

"It's his anchor," said Richard E. Snyder, chairman of Simon & Schuster, "That's home. That's family."

Mr. Snyder describes Mr. Woodward as "a brother." And Mr. Bradlee is described by Mr. Woodward's friends as a second father to him.

Mr. Woodward is from Wheaton, Ill., a small, solidly Republican town just west of Chicago. His father, a quiet, firm man known as Woody, was the town's leading lawyer. About the time Mr. Woodward was approaching adolescence, his parents' marriage broke up. The scandal is still remembered in Wheaton. "She moved into another man's house, and his father got the kids," said Scott Armstrong, who is also from Wheaton. Mr. Armstrong is a longtime friend of Mr. Woodward, and was co-author with him of "The Brethren," a book about the United States Supreme Court.

Going Alone to Hometown

Elsa Walsh, Mr. Woodward's third wife, said scars from that bitter divorce left her husband "very close to the vest." She said that though they have lived together for eight years, he has never taken her to Wheaton.

Ms. Walsh said that Mr. Woodward and his mother drew somewhat closer before she died last summer, and that he was devastated by her death, out of a sense that it was too late to resolve their difficult relationship.

Though not a dog lover, he insisted on adopting his mother's small dog, a Maltese named Freddy. "He will be looking at the dog and say, 'Freddy has Mother's big, sad eyes,'" Ms. Walsh said. A few months after his mother's death, Mr. Woodward and

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Ms. Walsh were married, as his mother had urged.

Mr. Woodward's father wanted him to become a lawyer; he chose journalism, after Yale and the Navy. He joined The Post in 1971, after two years at a suburban paper in Maryland, and nine months before the Watergate break-in that catapulted him and another metropolitan reporter, Carl Bernstein, to a Pulitzer Prize and celebrity.

Mr. Woodward and Mr. Bernstein wrote two books about Watergate, "All the President's Men" and "The Final Days." Both received huge offers from television.

A journalist serves two masters. And they both pay him.

Mr. Bernstein left for ABC, but his television career was brief. Mr. Bernstein, who says Mr. Woodward remains one of his closest friends, has been a Time magazine correspondent since January.

But Mr. Woodward stayed at The Post, moving to the metropolitan desk as an editor. It was speculated that Mr. Woodward would be Mr. Bradlee's heir apparent, especially after one of his reporters, Janet Cooke, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1981 for a series of articles about a child held captive by a drug dealer.

The prize was withdrawn when it was learned that Ms. Cooke had fabricated the story.

Controversy has swirled around each of Mr. Woodward's books. There are those who still dispute whether "Deep Throat," a Watergate source described in "All the President's Men," was a person, as Mr. Woodward and Mr. Bernstein have long insisted, or a composite or even a myth.

"The Brethren" was assailed for a technique in which conversations between Supreme Court justices were re-created. John Belushi's widow, Judy, blasted Mr. Woodward for what she said was a misleading and one-sided look at her husband in "Wired."

Mr. Woodward says he expects controversy, but that his books have proven accurate.

Typically, Mr. Woodward declines to discuss how he does his job except in generalities. But those who have worked with Mr. Woodward say his trademarks are careful preparation and interviewing crucial sources again and again. Mr. Bernstein terms him "relentless," and says his greatest gift is being a brilliant listener.

Several people who have watched his technique describe what might be characterized as dogged seduction. Pete Williams, an assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, recalls that Mr. Woodward enlisted his aid in arranging interviews and smoothing the way with other public affairs officers, who were helpful in turn.

Mr. Williams describes Mr. Woodward's style as "like Columbo," referring to the television detective.

"Woodward says things like, 'Could you help me with this?' " said Mr. Williams. "I think he'd make a great guidance counselor."

Col. F. William Smullen 3rd, the spokesman for the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, said Mr. Woodward asked him to arrange an interview with Vice Adm. Jonathan Howe, then an assistant to the chairman, who very seldom gave interviews. Mr. Woodward began the interview by complimenting the admiral on a 412-page book about global politics and sea power the admiral had written in 1972, which Colonel Smullen did not know about.

"He told me he stayed up half the night reading the book," Colonel Smullen said of Mr. Woodward.

'An Element of Flattery'

Colonel Smullen said Mr. Woodward was careful about body language, leaning forward attentively and listening to what was being said, which gave a momentum to an interview. "He's not adversarial," Colonel Smullen said. "If he hits a nerve, he doesn't go back to it; he comes back from another angle so he doesn't violate that comfort zone."

Ms. Walsh said a favorite Woodward tactic was to invite a source to dinner at their home. While he may not take notes, she said, he often spends hours in his third-floor study after dinner, dictating material gleaned during conversation, while it is still fresh in his mind.

Mr. Armstrong says that Mr. Woodward tends to identify strongly with the institutions and individuals he is examining, which encourages sources to talk. Some Pentagon officials who have monitored Mr. Woodward's progress say that he speaks regularly, even weekly, with General Powell. It is also denied by General Powell.

"I swear Woodward was ready to hit the beaches with the boys," Mr. Amstrong said, about the invasion of Panama. "He's bonded with Colin Powell's mind."

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